Chicago's location in the center of America is as important as the human heart in the body. For 150 years, Chicago has remained the nation’s busiest rail hub. All six U.S. Class I railroads operate there, as do many non-Class I railroads. As freight rail volumes and demand for passenger rail service continue to rise, Chicago has also become the largest U.S. rail chokepoint.

To improve the flow of trains through the rail heart of America, the region’s six Class I railroads joined forces with Amtrak, Metra, the Illinois Department of Transportation, the Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways, and the Chicago Department of Transportation to form the CREATE Program. Launched in 2003, the $4.6 billion plan involves 70 critical rail and highway infrastructure improvement projects in northeastern Illinois to enhance the efficiency and safety of the region’s rail network.

**Improving Safety & Relieving Congestion**

Safety is a never-ending pursuit for the freight rail industry. As part of the 70 CREATE projects, 25 will separate crossings with new roadway overpasses and underpasses at locations where pedestrian, auto and emergency vehicles travel over grade-level railroad tracks. Six projects will implement new rail overpasses or underpasses to separate passenger and freight train tracks. These improvements will allow emergency vehicles to move more efficiently, keep pedestrians and drivers off the tracks and save commuters 230,000 hours annually in grade crossing delays.

**Enhancing Capacity & Economic Growth**

The CREATE program, combined with ongoing annual freight railroad investments, will help the Chicago region handle up to 50,000 more freight trains annually by 2051, which is good news because the DOT expects freight rail traffic to grow 30% by 2040.

Improvements to the Chicago regional rail system will help keep freight on trains instead of diverting it to trucks, which operate on increasingly congested, crumbling highways. CREATE will also help improve the region’s economy by adding an estimated 44,000 jobs and generating $31.5 billion in economic benefits over the next three decades.
**CIROC: Managing New Capacity Through Technology**

Effectively managing the heart of the rail network takes more than just new infrastructure; it takes meticulous, coordinated planning across all railroads to manage operations efficiently. The Chicago Integrated Rail Operations Center (CIROC) is the brain that helps make that possible. This 24/7 command center allows railroads to continually watch real-time information fed in from sensors placed across the network. Using cutting-edge computer programs, different railroad companies work together to:

- Anticipate potential operational problems.
- Forecast events that reduce speed and capacity, such as severe weather.
- Review train routing and schedules.
- Mobilize the right equipment, materials and personnel to keep trains efficiently moving through the city, especially during rush hour.

**75th CIP Keeps Passengers & Freight Moving**

CREATE addresses one of the most congested points in Chicago and the national rail network. The **75th Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP)** will reduce congestion where 30 Metra trains, roughly 90 freight trains and two Amtrak trains cross each other daily. The project will also benefit freight customers, reduce emissions due to train idling and will eliminate 3.5 hours of daily road closures for drivers.

**Driving America’s Global Competitiveness**

According to the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), exports from Illinois have more than doubled in the past decade. The DOT predicts the volume of imported and exported goods transported via rail to, from or through Chicago will increase by nearly 150% between 2010 and 2040. Infrastructure improvements planned through the CREATE Program are critical to fully unlocking the potential of the national freight rail system to meet this future demand.